



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONGRESSWOMAN
CHELLIE PINGREE

1ST DISTRICT
MAINE

March 27, 2009

The Honorable Jane Lubchenco
Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere
Department of Commerce
141 Street, between Pennsylvania & Constitution Avenues, N.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Dr. Lubchenco

Congratulations on your appointment to NOAA. Thank you for meeting with the New England delegation on March 25, to discuss the proposed 2009 interim groundfish regulations. While I was not able to attend the meeting, I want to make sure Maine's voice is heard as you move forward with the interim rule.

I know you have heard many comments about the serious and significant economic burden the proposed rule would ask fishermen and fishing communities to shoulder. I echo these comments, but I want to call attention to the impacts of the interim rule to Maine's coastal communities and urge you to consider this, as well as the input you've heard from my colleagues and others, in crafting a final rule.

Downeast Maine once sustained a thriving ground fish industry. The industry now effectively stops at Port Clyde. East of Port Clyde, Maine's fishing industry is almost entirely dependent on lobster – communities that rely on a single species are particularly vulnerable. This truly hits home to me, as someone who lives in an island community with historical ties to the ground fish industry and strong ties to the lobster industry.

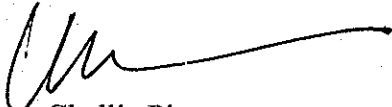
Despite the present hardships and limited fishing opportunities, Maine's small boat, community-based fishermen such as the Midcoast Fishermen's Association based in Port Clyde are creating new and innovative business models and developing gear technologies that will make fishing more sustainable in the long run. These ideas and opportunities need a chance to be tested – 20 days at sea is not enough to do this. The future of the ground fish industry maybe forged in the next year or two and this is critical time for many of the small and innovative business, dedicated sustainably fishing.

Beyond the fishermen, this rule threatens the supporting infrastructure, necessary to sustain a viable fishing community in the future. The loss of revenue for these institutions endangers their continued existence and once these business and supporting facilities are gone, they are gone for good. Places like the Portland Fish Exchange rely heavily on the ground fish industry for survival, and may not make it through this interim rule.

If the infrastructure necessary to support the groundfish industry is lost, Maine's groundfish industry will likely never recover. In Maine, we have seen firsthand that once the working infrastructure is lost, the high cost of waterfront real estate means the wharves and waterfront access that are necessary for daily fishing operations disappear.

The interim rule does not solve any of the fundamental problems with the New England fishery – overcapacity, misalignment of economic incentives, and a regulatory system that requires a level scientific understanding and certainty that our complex natural environment cannot provide. The rule does not align with the realities of our fisheries in Maine and the interim rule threatens the very existence of Maine's groundfish industry. I hope and encourage you adopt a final rule as close to the council's recommendation as possible.

Thank you for being open to these concerns and for taking them into consideration as you work towards a final rule. I believe that there is a path that will not spell such imminent disaster for Maine's fisheries, and I am looking forward to working with you on this and other matters in the coming weeks and months.



Chellie Pingree